

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and Literature –  
Teaching English as a Foreign Language and German Language and Literature –  
Teaching German As a Foreign Language

Ana Marija Marelja

**The Relationship between Writing Anxiety and Beliefs about  
Writing in Learners Preparing for the State School-leaving Exam in  
EFL**

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Višnja Pavičić Takač, Full Professor

Osijek, 2018.

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nastavnički smjer i njemačkog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer

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**Odnos između straha o pisanju i uvjerenja o pisanju kod učenika  
koje se pripremaju za državnu mature iz engleskog kao stranog  
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Diplomski rad

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Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

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**Abstract:**

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between writing anxiety and beliefs about writing in learners preparing for the state school leaving exam. In particular, we investigated whether there was a difference in writing anxiety levels and beliefs about writing between learners who chose the A and those who choose the B at the State School-leaving Exam in EFL.

The results show a positive correlation between writing anxiety and the belief in transmission, but a negative correlation between writing anxiety and transaction. The results also point to the differences in beliefs between students depending on the level they choose.

**Key words:** writing skill, writing anxiety, beliefs about writing, state school-leaving exam

**Sažetak:**

Glavni je cilj ovoga rada istražiti odnos između straha o pisanju i uvjerenjima o pisanju kod učenika koji se pripremaju za državnu maturu. Osobito smo istražili postoji li razlika u razini straha o pisanju i uvjerenjima o pisanju između učenika koji su izabrali A razinu na državnoj maturi i onih koji su izabrali B razinu. Rezultati pokazuju pozitivnu korelaciju između straha o pisanju i uvjerenja u *transmission* te negativnu korelaciju između straha o pisanju i uvjerenja o *transaction*. Rezultati također pokazuju razliku u uvjerenjima između učenika ovisno o razini koju su izabrali.

**Ključne riječi:** vještina pisanja, strah od pisanja, uvjerenja o pisanju, državna matura

## 1. Introduction

“Not a great deal is known about individual methods of composing a writing text, but most people agree that it is neither an easy nor a spontaneous activity. It usually requires some conscious mental effort” (Byrne, 1982: 1). Writing, a daunting task even for native speakers, becomes even more difficult when one has to write in a foreign language. Because it is so difficult to write in a foreign language some students develop a fear of writing. This fear is called writing anxiety or apprehension (Daly and Miller, 1975).

Experts (for example Daly and Miller, 1975; Cheng, 2002; Singh and Rajalingam, 2012) agree that writing apprehension plays an important role in foreign language acquisition and learning.

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between writing anxiety and beliefs about writing in the context of the Croatian state school-leaving exam in EFL.

Not many researchers have considered the effect high stake testing, such as the Croatian state school-leaving exam (henceforth Matura exam in EFL), has on writing anxiety and beliefs about writing. Filling this gap could teach us more about how to teach students about writing, lower writing anxiety levels of students taking such an exam, or how to influence their beliefs about writing to help them not only with the exam but also with their writing anxiety.

According to the Ministry of Science and Education, the Matura exam is an objective way to evaluate a student's knowledge attained during their high school education.<sup>1</sup>

In order to complete their high school education and apply for a university, senior year, i.e. fourth year grammar school students are required to take the Matura exam by law. Students attending vocational schools in the duration of four years as well as other high school programs lasting four years can OPT to take the Matura exam.<sup>2</sup>

The Matura exam has three obligatory subjects a student needs to take – the Croatian Language, mathematics and a foreign language (students can choose which language they would like to take, but most often they choose English). The Matura exam in the three obligatory subjects can be taken at two levels (which are the choice of the student); A (higher level) and B (basic level).

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (visited on 10th August 2018)

<sup>2</sup>[http://dokumenti.ncvvo.hr/Drzavna\\_matura/2013-01-07/pravilnik\\_polaganja\\_dm\\_2013.pdf](http://dokumenti.ncvvo.hr/Drzavna_matura/2013-01-07/pravilnik_polaganja_dm_2013.pdf) (p. 1-2)

Additionally, the students can also choose elective subjects (such as history, geography etc.) depending on what the university of their choice requires of them to take.

In order to pass the Matura exam a student has to pass these three obligatory parts.<sup>3</sup> As such the Matura exam is a high stake test.

High stakes testing is so named because the test outcomes are used to make important, often life-altering decisions. Such decisions may include the denial of a high school diploma, the repetition of a grade, the labeling of students and schools in pejorative ways, the withholding of funding, and even the closing of a school. Students who may do well in school all year but fail a high stakes test may be required to attend summer school and take the test again or spend another year in the same grade. (Johnson and Johnson 2009 as cited in Frančešević 2015: 12)

Looking at the definition we can see that high stake testing can influence the future of the students quite tremendously. Despite that, many countries have opted for high stake testing as it offers a quick way to test a variety of different knowledge and is an objective way to test it.

The first part of this paper brings an overview of the related literature. The second part of the paper presents the research itself. It describes the methodology (the participants, process and instruments used) as well as the results of the research, followed by a discussion, conclusion and implications.

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<sup>3</sup>[http://dokumenti.ncvvo.hr/Drzavna\\_matura/2013-01-07/pravilnik\\_polaganja\\_dm\\_2013.pdf](http://dokumenti.ncvvo.hr/Drzavna_matura/2013-01-07/pravilnik_polaganja_dm_2013.pdf) (p. 3 -4)



## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 The nature and purpose of writing**

#### ***2.1.1 What is writing?***

By using graphic symbols, i.e. letters or rather combinations of letters which are in connection with the sounds we produce while speaking, we write. This means that writing, on the one hand, is the act of creating marks on a flat surface. However, writing consists of a lot more than the production of these symbols. These symbols have to be put in order, according to certain rules, to create a word. Words are then used in a particular order to create sentences. However, when we write we do not just write a single sentences or even a set of unrelated sentences. We create a chain of sentences put together in a certain order and related in a specific way. Because of this the sentences form a coherent whole, a 'text' (Byrne, 1982).

When writing a text, we think about the way in which we want to arrange and combine sentences, we double-check what we have written to better our writing, make notes, or write several versions before we are satisfied with what we have produced. That is because we are writing for an audience. Writing is most often used to deliver a message of some kind. While reading we are interpreting this message. Aside from when we are writing something for ourselves, the audience is not physically there. Because of this we have to make sure that the message we are trying to convey with our writing can be understood even without our presence there to further explain (Byrne, 1982).

#### ***2.1.2 Writing and speaking***

Comparing speech and writing can help us explain a few of the struggles which are entangled in writing.

Firstly, when we speak we have a situation which we are present for and which helps provide us with vocabulary to use. Furthermore, we do not have to be as precise as we have to be in writing as many references become clear with the context of the situation (for example *that guy behind you*). Second, the person we are interacting with is physically present and the interaction is happening in real time. Therefore, the speaking and listener, which are interchanging roles, can give each other feedback: verbal and non-verbal. Verbal feedback can be given in a variety of ways from a simple 'oh' sound to an actual sentence. Non-verbal feedback comes in the form of

facial expressions and is equally as important in order to see whether the message that was being conveyed has been successfully received and understood (Byrne, 1982).

While speaking we are given a plethora of other resources to help us communicate our message. These are called prosodic features. They entail pitch of voice, loudness, speed and rhythm among others. This means that not only what we say is important in spoken discourse, but also how we say it (Byrne, 1982).

In comparison, writing is left without present context. Instead, the writer needs to create the context. There is no communication between the audience and the writer. This means that the whole process of communication is left to be completed by the writer alone. Furthermore, the prosodic features of spoken language are not available to the writer. Instead, the writer relies only on linguistic structures, though a writer can employ graphological devices such as punctuation to help in conveying the message (Byrne, 1982).

Writing takes a longer thought process and more preparation than communicating a message while speaking. When we speak we have the chance to correct our message and make absolutely sure that the receiver of the message understood it in real time, however, when writing, the message needs to be formed beforehand and there is no chance to go back and correct it once it is complete as the writer will, in most cases, no longer be present when the text is being read to further elaborate on it (Byrne, 1982).

This, however, is not to say that only speaking has its advantages. While it is true that when we write we have to be more organized and structured we also do not have to write quickly and in 'real time'. Equally, we may not have direct feedback from our reader, like a speaker has from the listener; but, we do have the time to revise and re-read what we have written in order to improve on it. The reader, in some respects, is, unlike the listener, privileged as he can read at his/her own pace and read the message as many times as needed. This shows that both forms of communication have their advantages and disadvantages (Byrne, 1982).

### ***2.1.3 Difficulties while writing***

There are three types of problems caused by writing: linguistic, cognitive and psychological.

The linguistic problems in writing are mostly caused by the absence of the physical presence of the audience. Since we do not have the prosodic features of speaking directly to someone at our

disposal, we have to ensure that the message we are trying to convey is understood with just our choice of words arrangement of sentences and sequencing of these sentences (Byrne, 1982).

Writing is not something we are taught to do from birth (like for example speaking), it is instead learned through instructions. We are taught how to master writing in institutions, such as schools. In addition, we have to acquire linguistic structures which are not typically used in speech, but are very effective in communicating in written form. Moreover, we have to gain insight in how to organize our thoughts, so that the reader, who is not present and probably not known to us, can understand them. Lastly, most often than not, writing is imposed on us. This not only causes us to be lost for thoughts, but can also cause psychological problems (Byrne, 1982).

The solitariness that usually accompanies writing activities, is psychologically challenging enough on its own, however, when writing is imposed on us not only do we have to complete it on our own, but are also hard pressed for ideas, which can put a strain on a person's emotional wellbeing (Byrne, 1982).

Cheng (2002: 647) recognizes writing "as an emotional as well as cognitive activity". Brand (1987: 442) states: "It is in cognition that ideas make sense. But it is in emotion that this sense finds value. Without such priorities we could not think". As such, writing is a very complex activity that put emphasis not only on knowledge, but also on the emotions the author has on the written topic.

#### ***2.1.4 Writing as a language skill***

Each of the four language skills is distinct from each other. However, they can be grouped into two categories; receptive and productive skills. Receptive language skills are listening and reading (Powers, 2010). Receptive – also known as passive skills – do not require the student to produce anything on their own. In contrast, writing and speaking are productive skills – also known as active skills – and, unlike the receptive ones, they require the student to actively produce language (Golkova and Hubackova, 2014). As a productive skill, writing is primarily used to convey messages (Powers, 2010).

#### ***2.1.5 Sub skills and stages of writing***

Writing is not only centered on accuracy. As stated above, writing is primarily used to communicate a message. In order to be able to successfully communicate that message, a student needs to master the sub skills which are used to form a good writing text (see Table 1).

*Table 1: List of writing sub skills (by Aryadoust, 2010: 4)*

| Sub Skill   | Description and elements  |
|---|---|
| Arrangement of Ideas and Examples (AIE)                   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) presentation of ideas, opinions, and information</li> <li>2) aspects of accurate and effective paragraphing</li> <li>3) elaborateness of details</li> <li>4) use of different and complex ideas and efficient arrangement</li> <li>5) keeping the focus on the main theme of the prompt</li> <li>6) understanding the tone and genre of the prompt</li> <li>7) demonstration of cultural competence</li> </ol>  |
| Communicative Quality (CQ) or Coherence and Cohesion (CC) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) range, accuracy, and appropriacy of coherence-markers (transitional words and/or phrases)</li> <li>2) using logical pronouns and conjunctions to connect ideas and/or sentences</li> <li>3) logical sequencing of ideas by use of transitional words</li> <li>4) the strength of conceptual and referential linkage of sentences/ideas</li> </ol>   |
| Sentence Structure Vocabulary (SSV)                       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) using appropriate, topic-related and correct vocabulary (adjectives, nouns, verbs, prepositions, articles, etc.), idioms, expressions, and collocations</li> <li>2) correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (the density and communicative effect of errors in spelling and the density and communicative effect of errors in word formation (Shaw &amp; Taylor, 2008, p. 44))</li> <li>3) appropriate and correct syntax (accurate use of verb tenses and independent and subordinate clauses)</li> <li>4) avoiding use of sentence fragments and fused sentences</li> <li>5) appropriate and accurate use of synonyms and antonyms</li> </ol> |

These sub skills only tell us what a good writing text looks like. Unlike in the classroom where there is often limited time to create a good text, outside of it people go through six stages in order to produce a quality text. And those are; “1. Brainstorming (thinking of everything we can about the topic); 2. Making notes; 3. Planning (organizing our ideas); 4. Writing a draft (a piece of writing that is not yet finished, and may be changed); 5. Editing (correcting and improving the

text); 6. Proof-reading (checking for mistakes in accuracy) or editing again” (Aguilera 2012: 165).

### ***2.1.6 Teaching writing***

As Rivers (1981) points out, many people whose native language is English tend to express themselves poorly in writing and, only a small number of native speakers of any language fully acquire the writing skills and only after many years of perfecting it through practice, whether guided or at home. Those facts are often ignored when it comes to teaching writing in EFL. Because teachers are limited in the amount of time they have with their students most often than not, they are forced to summarize the writing process and cannot allow students to go through all six stages of writing during their class. Especially in Croatia where students only have three forty-five minute lessons of English a week it becomes impossible to teach it with a lot of detail, devote the needed time to do so or to simply practice writing.

It is also important to note that writing in a foreign language is much more difficult than speaking it, because the learner cannot see the receiver of the message, they cannot visualize the mood or even if the message is understood. This can help teachers understand the struggles students have with writing. In order to help students write better, a teacher would need to explain the context, the audience which will read the writing text, how to form the writing text, whether to be informal or formal when writing etc.

Many researchers (Golkova and Hubackova, 2014; Aguilera, 2012; Rivers, 1981) argue that writing requires a deep understanding of not only the correct language structures, but also of the writing process and the stages of writing. This means that teachers need to teach students about the process and stages of writing and how to implement them while writing.

### ***2.1.7 Evaluation of writing skill***

As Golkova and Hubackova (2014: 479) point out “one important and necessary part in the process of learning is teacher’s evaluation and provided feedback. Traditionally, the teacher evaluates his learners either by giving grades or verbally”.

Writing means that the learners have to produce a text based on a variety of different stimuli (Powers, 2010). In essence this seems simple. However, in order to form a coherent text with well-organized ideas and good sentence structures and cohesion a lot of work, time and effort needs to be devoted to going through the writing stages.

Still, as some researchers (Golkova and Hubackova, 2014; Rivers, 1981) point out, writing needs to have clear criteria according to which it will be evaluated so the learners have a clear idea of what is expected of them.

In Croatian schools the writing skill is evaluated in a variety of different ways. Most often it is tested by having students write essays on a variety of different topics which have been covered in previous lessons. Depending on the type of essay (descriptive, argumentative or analytical) the students are required to show not only that they can write in English, but also their creativity, spelling, grammar and understanding of the topic at hand. What certainly plays a role in grading writing tasks are the sub skills listed in Table 1. When we look at all this it becomes clear why evaluating a written assignment objectively can be quite challenging.

Most often a scale with different elements of the writing is used to determine which grade a student should receive. As the context of this research is the Croatian State School-leaving Exam in EFL we will look at how the writing portion is graded on the higher and lower level of the exam.

*Table 2: Scale for grading the writing task in State School-leaving exam in EFL (higher level)*  
(Ban et al., 2012: 46)

| <b>Points</b> | <b>Task completion</b>   | <b>Coherence and Cohesion</b>  | <b>Vocabulary</b>   | <b>Grammar</b>   |
|---------------|--|--|---|--|
| <b>5</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All parts of the prompt fairly equally developed.</li> <li>• Main ideas well supported.</li> </ul>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear flow of ideas.</li> <li>• Effective use of paragraphing and cohesive devices.</li> </ul>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide range for the task.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form/spelling occur but do not impede easy understanding.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide range for the task.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form occur but do not impede easy understanding.</li> </ul> |
| <b>4</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All parts of the prompt developed but unequally.</li> <li>• Main ideas generally well supported.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally clear flow of ideas.</li> <li>• Good use of paragraphing and cohesive devices.</li> </ul>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good range for the task.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form/spelling sometimes impede easy understanding.</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good range for the task.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form sometimes impede easy understanding.</li> </ul>        |
| <b>3</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One part of the prompt not developed.</li> <li>• Main ideas sufficiently supported. / Not</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flow of ideas sometimes unclear.</li> <li>• Limited use of paragraphing or cohesive devices.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient range for the task.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form/spelling sometimes cause difficulty in</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally uses simple structures.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form sometimes cause difficulty in</li> </ul>      |

|          |   |  |  |  |
|----------|---|--|--|--|
|          | all main ideas relevant.  |  | understanding.   | understanding.   |
| <b>2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two parts of the prompt not developed. / The essay is largely irrelevant.</li> <li>• Main ideas insufficiently supported.</li> <li>• Insufficient language control. / Inappropriate layout.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flow of ideas frequently unclear.</li> <li>• Inadequate use of paragraphing or cohesive devices.</li> <li>• Insufficient language control.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range is inadequate for the task.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form/spelling frequently cause difficulty in understanding.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relies on simple structures.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form frequently cause difficulty in understanding.</li> </ul> |
| <b>1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient prompt development. / The essay is irrelevant.</li> <li>• No clear main idea.</li> <li>• Generally unintelligible.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flow of ideas cannot be followed.</li> <li>• Generally unintelligible.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range is severely restricted.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/form/spelling generally prevent understanding.</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range is severely restricted.</li> <li>• Inaccuracies in usage/ form generally prevent understanding.</li> </ul>            |
| <b>0</b> | The script is unintelligible or has less than 50 words.   |  |  |  |

As the writing portion of the exam (on the A level) is an argumentative essay, it is graded by looking at each sub-skill of writing and evaluating how well it was completed in the essay. These sub-skills are: task completion, coherence and cohesion, vocabulary, and grammar. It was an attempt at objectifying the grading, so as to leave out all subjective feelings of the grader (see Table 2). The student needs to know the topic, they need to have the proper vocabulary to express their knowledge on the topic, they need to put together arguments on the topic and arrange them in a way that makes sense to the reader. The arguments need to be well elaborated and make sense for the topic at hand as well as lead to a sensible conclusion of the essay.

At the B level of the Matura exam in EFL students receive a set of questions, usually in the form of an email that they have to answer in the same form. Grading these kinds of written assignments differs from grading essays.

*Table 3: Scale for grading the writing task in State School-leaving exam in EFL (lower level)*  
(Ban et al. 2012: 48)

| Points | Task completion                     | Points | Language  |
|--------|-------------------------------------|--------|---|
| 5      | All 3 questions are fully answered. | 10     | The text is completely understandable despite minor errors. |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
|   |   |   | Very good range of vocabulary/structures.   |
| 4 | 2 questions fully answered, 1 unclearly.  | 9 |   |
|   |   | 8 | The text is easy to understand despite some errors. Good range of vocabulary/structures.                                |
|   |   | 7 |   |
| 3 | Only 2 questions are fully answered.  | 6 | The text is understandable despite numerous errors. Sufficient range of vocabulary/structures                           |
|   |   | 5 |   |
| 2 | 1 question fully answered, 2 unclearly.<br>or<br>3 questions answered unclearly.  | 4 | The text is difficult to understand in places due to numerous errors. Inadequate range of vocabulary/structures.        |
|   |   | 3 |   |
| 1 | Only 1 question is fully answered.<br>or<br>1 question is fully answered, 1 unclearly.<br>or<br>2 questions are answered unclearly. | 2 | The text is generally difficult to understand due to error density. Severely restricted range of vocabulary/structures. |
|   |   | 1 |   |
| 0 | The text does not answer any of the questions or cannot be understood.  |   |   |

As we can see, not only is the type of task different, but so are the grading criteria. Here the importance is on answering the questions; whether these answers make sense and the range of vocabulary and grammatical structure is sufficient for the level the student is at (see Table 3).

### 2.3 Writing Anxiety

A lot of people find that writing makes them far less anxious than speaking, because, unlike with oral production, where everything is produced on the spot within a limited time frame, writing possesses a controlled environment that allows the person to think carefully about the message that they want to communicate as well as how they want to communicate the message. However, despite this, many people still find writing hard, frustrating, and are even prone to writing anxiety, not only in L2 but also in L1 (Cheng, 2004).

While looking around their classroom, most teachers can take notice of students that have an unnecessary fear of writing. Daly and Miller (1975) have named this fear *writing apprehension*.



They were the first researches who “drew attention to the prevalence and possible detrimental effects of writing anxiety among students at all levels in the United States” (Cheng, 2002: 647).

“Daly defines writing apprehension as ‘the general avoidance of situations perceived by individuals to potentially require some amount of writing, accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing’” (Daly as cited in Alnufaire and Grenfell, 2013: 79).

As we live in a world where writing is a requirement in most professions, even if it’s not an essay that is required, Daly and Miller (1975) state that it is important to study writing apprehension as there are perhaps a lot of people who will fail at writing simply because they are faced with writing apprehension and not because of a lack of skills. These individuals tend to avoid writing at all costs and in classroom situations avoid writing tasks, or even fail to show up when they know they will be faced with it. Those same individuals fear their writing being evaluated, and of course that would be the case since they rarely engage in writing activities and as such their writing skill is poorly developed.

Erkan (2011: 166) states that “expressing one’s ideas in written form in a second or foreign language, and doing so with reasonable accuracy and coherence, is a major achievement”. As stated above, writing is a very complex form of expression and as such may induce a certain fear in individuals who have trouble communicating their ideas or thought, or perhaps find themselves lacking in certain areas such as grammar or vocabulary (Erkan, 2011).

## **2.4 Beliefs about Writing**

Recent studies (Sander-Reio, 2010; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014) have started exploring whether domain specific beliefs about writing influence other aspects of writing such as writing self-efficacy and writing apprehension. Domain specific beliefs about writing state “what good writing is and what good writers do” (Sanders-Reio et al., 2014: 1).

“The knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs that students hold about writing play an important part in determining how the composing process is carried out and what the eventual shape of the written product will be” (Graham, Schwartz, and MacArthur as cited in Sanders-Reio et al., 2014: 1).

Researchers (Kellogg, 2008; Sanders-Reio, 2010) divide domain specific beliefs about writing into four categories; recursive process, transaction, transmission and audience orientation.

In this case the recursive process focuses on a writer going back and revising, that is, constantly trying to improve one's writing. The process of revision, re-reading and editing are given high importance (Sanders-Reio, 2010).

Transaction stands for the emotional and cognitive process happening while writing something and how much that influences, or should influence the written. Kellogg (2008) argues that writing and the cognitive process are closely linked. According to him writers can use every knowledge they have stored over time, but only if this knowledge is cognitively accessible to them. It is even said that good writers are "seen as substantive thinkers" (Kellogg, 2008: 2).

Transmission reflects "arguments, information and quotes provided by authority". White and Bruning state that writer with high transmissional beliefs see "writing primarily as a means of transmitting authoritative knowledge to readers with minimal injection of the writers' own views and thoughts" (as cited in Sander-Reio, 2010: 49).

And lastly audience oriented writing, which as the name suggests advocates that a good writer has their readers in mind while writing something and their main goal is to adapt their writing to their reads interests (Sanders-Reio et al., 2014). Traxler and Grenbacher (1993) argue that if a writer wants to convey their message effectively and can envision how their audience will interpret their writing, they should not write something their audience cannot comprehend.

## **2.5 Review of Previous Research**

In the last 20 years, writing research has become its own discipline and was connected to cognitive psychology, whose opinions were largely present in empirical studies of writing in the first and foreign language. A lot of research has been done on elaborating on the mental process connected to the process of writing, but without taking into account emotions and the affective domain. However, according to Clachar (as cited in Cheng, 2004: 42), "evidence from neuropsychological literature has been accumulating that shows the dynamic interactions among emotion, cognition, and language". By taking into account that emotions, the cognitive processes of the brain and writing are linked together, more and more research has given these factor an important place in the writing process (some of which will be reported on in the following text). However not only emotions and cognitive process have been recognized as important to research. Beliefs about writing, attitudes and motivation have also become focal points of some researchers of the writing process (Cheng, 2004).

Many researchers (Cheng, 2002; Erkan, 2011; Singh and Rajalingman, 2012; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014) have done studies exploring the relationship between writing apprehension and writing proficiency, writing competence, writing self-efficacy and beliefs about writing. The results of these studies show that participants generally have average writing anxiety levels. It was also found that writing apprehension and writing performance are negatively correlated (Sanders-Reio et al., 2014; Erkan, 2011). The correlation between writing anxiety and attitudes towards writing is positive (Musgrove, 1998a; Erkan, 2011).

Research exploring types of domain specific beliefs about writing is sparse. However, in recent years some exploration into the topic has been made (Sander Reio, 2010; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014). It was shown that domain specific beliefs about writing strongly predict writing performance.

### **3. Present Study**

#### **3.1 Context of the research**

If a student chooses English as their foreign language it becomes the obligatory subject that student has to take in the exams. After that the student has to choose whether they are going to be taking the higher (A) or the basic (B) level at the Matura exam in EFL. The exams in EFL are modeled after the curriculum for Grammar schools. The Ministry for Science and Education in Croatia suggest that students who have not had English according to the Grammar School programme further their knowledge of grammatical structures as well as vocabulary and types of text they encountered during their education in order to keep up (Ban et al, 2012: 5).

The Matura exam in EFL contains three parts – reading and listening comprehension, and writing. The Exam is conducted (on the A level) in 180 minutes. All three sections are conducted separately. The reading portion takes 70 minutes, the listening 35 and the writing 75. The exam on the basic level has a timeframe of 85 minutes. Reading and writing are conducted separately from listening and take about 60 minutes, whereas listening takes about 25 minutes (Ban et al., 2012: 10; 31).

The writing portion of the exam which is the focal point of this paper is conducted on the A or B level. The writing portion on the A level is an essay that has to consist of 200 to 250 words. The essay test task completion, cohesion and coherence with the appropriate scope and the accuracy of lexical-structural forms (Ban et al, 2012: 9).

The writing portion on the B level of the exam consists of a short composition. The students receive a small message (usually in the form of an email) which consists of three questions or points. The task is to answer these questions in 40 to 60 words (Ban et al., 2012).

### **3.2 Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to show the relationship between the level chosen in the Matura exam in EFL (A or B level) and students writing anxiety, as well as the relationship between the chosen the A level and the students' beliefs about writing. Research question to be answered are:

1. Is there a difference in writing anxiety levels depending on the level (A or B) learners choose at the State School-leaving Exam in EFL?
2. Is there a difference in beliefs about writing depending on the level (A or B) learners choose at the State School-leaving Exam in EFL?
3. Is there a correlation between writing performance and beliefs about writing sub-categories (transmission, transaction, audience orientation and recursive process)?
4. Is there a correlation between writing anxiety and beliefs about writing sub-categories (transmission, transaction, audience orientation and recursive process)?
5. Is there a correlation between writing performance and writing apprehension?

### **3.3 Methodology**

#### ***3.3.1 Participants***

The study had a total of 145 participants. 97 of them attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and 48 the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Grammar School (Gimnazija Antuna Gustava Matoša) in Đakovo. Out of the 145 participants, 32.6% were male and 67.4% were female. More participants chose the A the A level at the Matura exam in EFL (73.2%) than the B level (26.8%).

Participants had been studying English for an average of 11 years ( $M = 11.19$ ,  $SD = .99$ ).

#### ***3.3.2 Instrument(s)***

There were two questionnaires used for the purpose of this study. Both were translated into the Croatian language. The first questionnaire was Daly and Miller's (1975) Writing Apprehension

Test (henceforth WAT). The WAT consist of 26 items. Out of the 26 items, 12 had to be reversed for analysis. The participants had to circle the answer on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1= I completely disagree; 5= I completely agree), depending to which degree the statement applies to them. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured using “[...] a split half technique. In this case, the top half of the test was compared with the bottom half. Corrected for attenuation the obtained reliability was .940” (Daly and Miller, 1975: 245).

The second questionnaire given to the students was a modified version of the Beliefs About Writing Survey, which also had the participants circling their answers on a 5-point Likert scale (1= I completely disagree; 5= I completely agree). The survey was developed by Sanders-Reio. It has 30 items which can be grouped into four sub-categories (see Table 4).

*Table 4: Beliefs about writing survey: subscales and items (Sander-Reio et al., 2014: 5)*

|  |
|--|
| Transmission: 5 items  |
| Good writers include a lot of quotes from authorities in their writing.                                  |
| Writing should focus on the information in books and articles.   |
| The key to successful writing is accurately reporting what authorities think.                            |
| The most important reason to write is to report what authorities think about a subject.                  |
| When writing, it’s best to use proven formats and templates, and then fill in the important information. |
| Transaction: 7 items   |
| Writing is a process involving a lot of emotion.   |
| Writing helps me understand better what I’m thinking about.  |
| Writing helps me see the complexity of ideas.  |
| My thoughts and ideas become more clear to me as I write and rewrite.                                    |
| Writing is often an emotional experience.  |
| Writers need to immerse themselves in their writing.   |
| Writing helps new ideas emerge.  |
| Recursive Process: 4 items   |
| Writing requires going back over it to improve what has been written.                                    |
| Good writing involves editing many times.  |
| Revision is a multi-stage process.   |
| The key to good writing is revising.   |
| Audience Orientation: 14 items   |
| Good writers make complicated information clear.   |
| Good writers are sensitive to their readers.   |

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Good writers support their points effectively.  
Good writers adapt their message to their readers.  
The key to good writing is conveying information clearly.  
Good writers keep their audience in mind.  
Good writers thoroughly explain their opinions and findings.  
Good writers are oriented toward their readers.  
Good writers are logical and convincing.  
Good writers are reader-friendly.  
Good writing sounds natural, not stiff.  
Good writers don't let their choice of words overshadow their message.  
It's important to select the words that suit your purpose, audience, and occasion.  
Good writers anticipate and answer their audience's questions.

---

Additionally, the following demographic information on participants was collected: their final grade in EFL; their average grade in writing (EFL) and for how many years they had been studying English.

In this study writing performance was measured by taking the overall grade in writing the students had provided. The final grade in EFL was taken as language skill performance value in the present study.

### ***3.3.3 Procedure***

The questionnaires were given to the students of the third and the fourth years of the same Grammar school. Both questionnaires were administered at the same time. They were advised to read through each items carefully and answer according to their own opinions and feelings on the subject. The instructions were given in Croatian and they were free to ask any questions they might have. The questionnaires were administered during regular classes with the permission of the teacher and school principal. The students did not have a time limit to complete the questionnaires, but on average took no more than ten minutes to complete them.

The students were also told that all their answers should only relate to their writing in the English language and not those done in other subjects (such as Croatian or German).

## **4. Results**

The writing anxiety questionnaire featured 26 items, 12 of which had to be reversed for analysis. The results show that the mean value for writing anxiety of all the students is 3.05 (SD=.802). According to previous studies (Singh and Rajalingman, 2012; Daly and Miller, 1975; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014; Cheng, 2002), this puts writing apprehension of all students as having average writing apprehension levels.

As for the individual responses for each of the items from the WAT and the differences between students taking the B levels (basic level) at the Matura Exam in EFL and those taking the A level (advanced/higher level), it can be observed that the anxiety is higher in those students who chose to take the Matura exam in EFL at the B level, than those taking the exam at A level (see Table 5).

*Table 5: Students responses to the WAT (B level vs. A level)*

|  | <i>B level in the Matura Exam</i> |             |           | <i>A level in the Matura Exam</i> |             |           |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
|  | <b>N</b>                          | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>N</b>                          | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
| I don't like writing in English                                  | 37                                | 3.3784      | 1.23269   | 101                               | 2.1386      | 1.31171   |
| I don't like having my writing evaluated                         | 37                                | 2.8378      | 1.25860   | 101                               | 2.0990      | 1.17902   |
| I am happy to express ideas in writing*                          | 37                                | 4.0541      | .94122    | 101                               | 3.1600      | 1.32360   |
| I don't like it when essays are graded                           | 37                                | 3.7838      | 1.27225   | 101                               | 2.9406      | 1.31774   |
| I am afraid of writing when it's being graded                    | 37                                | 3.4865      | 1.57448   | 101                               | 2.1287      | 1.30126   |
| I'm happy when I can hand in my essay for grading*               | 37                                | 4.1081      | 1.17340   | 101                               | 3.9802      | 1.10436   |
| When I need to start writing my mind goes completely blank       | 37                                | 3.5135      | 1.44571   | 101                               | 3.0594      | 1.39156   |
| Expressing ideas in writing is a complete waste of time          | 37                                | 2.5676      | 1.34455   | 101                               | 2.0693      | 1.26694   |
| I would enjoy writing compositions for grading and publishing*   | 37                                | 4.5135      | .96095    | 101                               | 3.8020      | 1.27295   |
| I like to write down my ideas*                                   | 37                                | 3.5405      | 1.21552   | 101                               | 3.0594      | 1.36983   |
| I'm sure in my ability to clearly transmit my ideas via writing* | 37                                | 3.5405      | .86905    | 101                               | 2.6327      | 1.13417   |

|   |    |        |         |     |        |         |
|---|----|--------|---------|-----|--------|---------|
| I like to give my writing to my friends to read*                  | 37 | 3.4595 | 1.26039 | 101 | 3.6436 | 1.22134 |
| I'm nervous when I have to write something                        | 37 | 3.4054 | 1.64079 | 101 | 2.9604 | 1.34849 |
| People like to read what I write*                                 | 37 | 3.7297 | .93240  | 101 | 3.1782 | .88765  |
| I like writing*   | 37 | 3.9189 | .92431  | 101 | 3.0198 | 1.40698 |
| I find it difficult to express my ideas in written form           | 37 | 3.2703 | 1.14622 | 101 | 2.5446 | 1.33060 |
| Writing is fun*   | 37 | 3.9459 | .97028  | 101 | 3.0198 | 1.37099 |
| I know I'm going to write a bad essay before I even start writing | 37 | 3.5405 | 1.44520 | 101 | 2.0792 | 1.27815 |
| I like to see my ideas on paper*                                  | 37 | 3.5946 | 1.09188 | 101 | 3.0099 | 1.18739 |
| I enjoy talking with others about my writing*                     | 37 | 4.0556 | 1.11981 | 101 | 3.7624 | 1.20953 |
| I find it hard to organize my ideas when I'm writing              | 37 | 3.2432 | 1.44155 | 101 | 2.5545 | 1.22045 |
| When I hand in my essay, I know I'm going to receive a bad grade  | 37 | 3.3243 | 1.41527 | 101 | 2.0000 | 1.24097 |
| I find it easy to write good essay*                               | 37 | 4.0270 | 1.09256 | 101 | 2.7228 | 1.25793 |
| Most of the other students writes better than me                  | 37 | 4.1081 | 1.14949 | 101 | 2.7426 | 1.13713 |
| I don't like it when my essay are graded                          | 37 | 3.6216 | 1.16312 | 101 | 2.9703 | 1.35245 |
| Writing isn't my strong side                                      | 37 | 3.4865 | 1.26099 | 101 | 2.2772 | 1.26585 |

*\*reversed items*

*Table 6: Independent t- test for writing anxiety (A level vs. B level)*

|                    | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| <i>The A level</i> | 2.84        | .76       | 5.733    | .086       |
| <i>The B level</i> | 3.64        | .58       |          |            |



Even though there is a difference between writing anxiety in students taking the B the A level and those taking the A the A level at the Matura exam in EFL, there is no statistical significance in these findings (see Table 6).

Audience oriented beliefs about writing assume that good writers are those who think about what their audience is like and how they are going to receive the message. These beliefs seem to be generally stronger in those taking the B level than those taking the A level Matura exam in EFL (see Table 7). The differences are especially pronounced in the following items; *Good writers support their points effectively*; *Good writers adapt their message to their readers*; *The key to good writing is conveying information clearly*; *Good writers keep their audience in mind* (see Table 7).

*Table 7: Students responses to beliefs about writing: audience orientation*

|  | The B level on the Matura Exam |        |         | The A level on the Matura Exam |        |         |
|--|--------------------------------|--------|---------|--------------------------------|--------|---------|
|  | N                              | Mean   | SD      | N                              | Mean   | SD      |
| Good writers make complicated information clear.             | 37                             | 3.8108 | 1.04981 | 100                            | 3.8700 | 1.04112 |
| Good writers are sensitive to their readers.                 | 37                             | 3.9459 | .97028  | 99                             | 3.9495 | 1.06305 |
| Good writers support their points effectively.               | 37                             | 4.2162 | .85424  | 100                            | 3.9901 | .94335  |
| Good writers adapt their message to their readers.           | 37                             | 3.9189 | .98258  | 100                            | 3.6700 | 1.14640 |
| The key to good writing is conveying information clearly.    | 37                             | 4.0811 | .92431  | 100                            | 3.7300 | 1.04306 |
| Good writers keep their audience in mind.                    | 37                             | 4.0270 | 1.01342 | 101                            | 3.7327 | 1.02850 |
| Good writers thoroughly explain their opinions and findings. | 37                             | 3.5405 | 1.12038 | 101                            | 3.6535 | 1.09941 |
| Good writers are oriented toward their readers.              | 37                             | 3.8649 | 1.00449 | 100                            | 3.4400 | 1.03787 |
| Good writers are logical and convincing.                     | 37                             | 3.7568 | 1.06472 | 101                            | 3.6634 | 1.14260 |
| Good writers are reader-friendly.                            | 37                             | 3.3333 | 1.28730 | 101                            | 2.9406 | 1.41295 |

|  |           |               |               |           |               |               |
|--|-----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Good writing sounds natural, not stiff.  | 37        | 4.0270        | 1.16634       | 101       | 3.9307        | 1.15981       |
| Good writers don't let their choice of words overshadow their message.             | 37        | 3.5135        | .86992        | 101       | 3.5347        | 1.00563       |
| It's important to select the words that suit your purpose, audience, and occasion. | 37        | 4.3243        | .81833        | 101       | 3.8119        | 1.11097       |
| Good writers anticipate and answer their audience's questions.                     | 37        | 3.6486        | 1.05978       | 101       | 3.4950        | 1.02590       |
| <b>Audience Orientation (All)</b>  | <b>36</b> | <b>3.8512</b> | <b>.56666</b> | <b>96</b> | <b>3.6786</b> | <b>.64256</b> |

*Table 8: Independent t- test for beliefs about writing: audience orientation (A level vs. B level)*

|                    | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| <i>The A level</i> | 3.68        | .64       | 1.418    | .529       |
| <i>The B level</i> | 3.85        | .57       |          |            |

There is no statistically significant difference in audience oriented beliefs between students depending on the level they choose at the Matura exam in EFL (see Table 8).

When it comes to transmission, i.e. the beliefs which advocates that good writing must be backed up with facts and opinions from authorities, it appears that students who chose the B level feel that transmission is more important than those who chose the A level on the exams (see Table 9). Particularly the item *The key to successful writing is accurately reporting what authorities think* has a higher mean value in students taking the B level than those taking the A level exam (see Table 9).

*Table 9: Students responses to beliefs about writing: transmission*

|   | <b>The B level on the Matura Exam</b> |             |           | <b>The A level on the Matura Exam</b> |             |           |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
|   | <b>N</b>                              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>N</b>                              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
| Good writers include a lot of quotes from authorities in their writing. | 37                                    | 3.2703      | 1.01786   | 101                                   | 2.9604      | 1.19934   |

|  |    |        |         |     |        |         |
|--|----|--------|---------|-----|--------|---------|
| Writing should focus on the information in books and articles.   | 37 | 2.7568 | 1.21118 | 100 | 2.5300 | 1.13222 |
| The key to successful writing is accurately reporting what authorities think.                            | 37 | 3.8919 | 1.02154 | 101 | 3.2871 | 1.16049 |
| The most important reason to write is to report what authorities think about a subject.                  | 37 | 3.2432 | 1.09050 | 101 | 3.1188 | 1.25130 |
| When writing, it's best to use proven formats and templates, and then fill in the important information. | 37 | 3.2432 | 1.11568 | 101 | 2.6931 | .99742  |
| <b>Transmission Beliefs (All)</b>  | 37 | 3.2811 | .73856  | 100 | 2.9240 | .82525  |

*Table 10: Independent t- test for Beliefs about writing: transmission (A level vs. B level)*

|                    | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| <i>The A level</i> | 2.92        | .83       | 2.311    | .384       |
| <i>The B level</i> | 3.28        | .74       |          |            |

However, the difference in transmissional beliefs about writing between learners taking different levels at the Matura exam in EFL is not statistically significant (see Table 10).

Transaction, the belief that good writers are those who involve cognitive process and emotions in their writing, seems to be held more strongly by those who chose the A level at the Matura exam (see Table 11). The item *Writing helps me understand better what I'm thinking about* is generally believed to be true by those taking the A level, whereas those taking the B level generally disagree with the statement. These results however, have no statistical significance (see Table 12).

*Table 11: Students responses to beliefs about writing: transaction*

|                                      | <b>The B level on the Matura Exam</b> |             |           | <b>The A level on the Matura Exam</b> |             |           |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
|                                      | <b>N</b>                              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>N</b>                              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
| Writing is a process involving a lot | 37                                    | 3.7500      | 1.05221   | 101                                   | 3.4554      | 1.11826   |

|   |    |               |               |     |               |               |
|---|----|---------------|---------------|-----|---------------|---------------|
| of emotion.   |    |               |               |     |               |               |
| Writing helps me understand better what I'm thinking about.           | 37 | 2.6486        | 1.18360       | 101 | 3.2178        | 1.22151       |
| Writing helps me see the complexity of ideas.                         | 37 | 3.0000        | 1.02740       | 101 | 3.2475        | 1.17818       |
| My thoughts and ideas become more clear to me as I write and rewrite. | 37 | 3.0541        | 1.22352       | 101 | 3.6337        | 2.33976       |
| Writing is often an emotional experience.                             | 37 | 4.2973        | .74030        | 101 | 4.2079        | .95202        |
| Writers need to immerse themselves in their writing.                  | 37 | 3.8378        | 1.09325       | 101 | 3.6337        | 1.18931       |
| Writing helps new ideas emerge.                                       | 37 | 3.6757        | 1.13172       | 101 | 3.9604        | .98915        |
| <b>Transaction Beliefs (All)</b>                                      | 37 | <b>3.4921</b> | <b>.69605</b> | 101 | <b>3.6223</b> | <b>.77607</b> |

*Table 12: Independent t- test for transactional beliefs (A level vs. B level)*

|                    | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>t</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| <i>The A level</i> | 3.62        | .77       | -.888    | .273       |
| <i>The B level</i> | 3.49        | .69       |          |            |

The recursive process is a belief which advocates that good writers revise and edit their writing many times. Table 13 shows that participant choosing the B level at the Matura exam believe more strongly in the recursive process than those choosing the A level. All the items describing the recursive process have higher values for the B level than for the A level. However, these results have no statistical significance (see Table 14).

*Table 13: Students responses to Beliefs about Writing: recursive process*

|   | <b>The B level on the Matura Exam</b> |             |           | <b>The A level on the Matura Exam</b> |             |           |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
|   | <b>N</b>                              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>N</b>                              | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
| Writing requires going back over it to improve what has been written. | 37                                    | 4.2973      | .84541    | 101                                   | 3.9010      | 1.07243   |

|   |           |               |               |            |               |               |
|---|-----------|---------------|---------------|------------|---------------|---------------|
| Good writing involves editing many times. | 37        | 3.4054        | 1.21242       | 101        | 3.1287        | 1.04559       |
| Revision is a multi-stage process.        | 37        | 3.6216        | .82836        | 100        | 3.3600        | 1.08730       |
| The key to good writing is revising.      | 37        | 3.8108        | 1.12640       | 101        | 3.6238        | 1.08491       |
| <b>Recursive Process Beliefs (All)</b>    | <b>37</b> | <b>3.7838</b> | <b>.62406</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>3.5075</b> | <b>.70662</b> |

Table 14: Independent t- test for recursive process – beliefs about writing (A level vs. B level)

|         | Mean  | SD   | t     | Sig  |
|---------|-------|------|-------|------|
| A level | 3.508 | .707 | 2.194 | .411 |
| B level | 3.784 | .624 |       |      |

Table 15: Pearson correlation between writing performance and sub-categories of beliefs about writing

|                            | transmission | transaction | recursive | audience |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Writing Performance</b> | -,322**      | ,116        | -,162     | -,014    |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

When we look at Table 15, we can see that writing performance (in this case measured by the grade in writing participant received in regular EFL classes) negatively correlates with the transmissional belief, the belief that good writing is backed up by facts and writing authorities. The belief in transaction that is, that emotions play a key role in being a good writer, positively correlates with writing performance. The recursive process and the belief in audience oriented writing negatively correlates with writing performance. Despite not being of significant correlation, this corroborates previous research which found that transaction is actually a positive indicator of writing performance (Sanders-Reio et al., 2014).

Table 16: Pearson correlation of writing anxiety and beliefs about writing sub-categories

|                        | transmission | transaction | recursive | audience |
|------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Writing anxiety</b> | ,233**       | -,475**     | ,030      | -,112    |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Writing apprehension (anxiety) negatively correlates with the belief in transaction, but correlates positively with the belief in transmission, which corroborates previous research (see Sander-Reio et al., 2014: 6). The recursive process is not important to writing anxiety, neither is the belief in audience oriented writing (see Table 16). This means that the higher the writing anxiety is the more will a person believe in transmission as an indicator of good writing. On the other hand, the higher the writing anxiety the lower the belief in transaction, which advocates the involvement of emotions as an indicator of good writing and vice versa, the stronger the belief in transaction the lower the writing anxiety.

*Table 17: Pearson correlation of writing anxiety and writing performance*

|                            | <b>Writing<br/>Performance</b> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Writing<br/>Anxiety</b> | -,562**                        |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Writing anxiety and writing performance negatively correlate with each other (see Table 17). That means that the lower the writing anxiety the higher the writing performance. This corroborates previous research (Cheng, 2004; Erkan, 2011; Sander-Reio et al., 2014).

## 5. Discussion

Looking at the results for writing anxiety in two groups (those taking the A level and those taking the B level at the Matura exam in EFL) we can see higher writing anxiety in those taking the B level exam. Students who continuously get bad results in writing tend to avoid that activity as well as those who think their writing is not good. Therefore, it makes sense that the apprehension to engage in this activity is higher than in those who get better result in writing and overall practice the activity more.

Beliefs about writing were interesting to observe in these two groups. Audience oriented beliefs were more pronounced in those taking the B level exam than in those taking the A level exam. Since we have already established that audience oriented beliefs positively correlate with writing performance and that those students who have better writing performance choose to take the A level exams, it is a bit surprising that the students with lower performance and the B level exam

would feel stronger about audience oriented beliefs. However, one can also argue that these results are the product of bad performance (i.e. grade in writing) since these students continuously get bad feedback, they think that the measure of a good writer is how he takes the audience into consideration. They probably believe that if they could take their audience (i.e. the teacher) into consideration and better predict what they want from them their writing performance would be more successful. Sander-Reio et al. (2014:9) argue that “clarity and development imply an audience for whom the text is clear, understandable, and for whom concepts and information are explained with appropriate detail”.

This can be seen when looking at the answer for the item *Good writers adapt their message to the reader*. The mean value for the B level participants was 3.92 whereas the mean value for the A level participants was 3.67.

The belief in transmission is higher in the group taking the B level Matura exam in EFL. We have already established that those taking the B the A level are generally more anxious about writing than those taking the A level. Their high belief in authority as an indicator of good writing is because those who follow the rules in writing get better grades. To elaborate, in Grammar schools students’ writing is generally evaluated by writing usually an argumentative essay. These types of essay have a strict form and are generally an accumulation of facts that speak for or against a given topic. Therefore, in these types of essays there is no real room for creativity, but just reporting back what was already said about the topic, which is what the belief in transmission is about. For example, when we look at the answers for item *The key to successful writing is accurately reporting what authorities think*, we can see a big difference in mean values: B level had a mean of 3.89 (SD=1.02), whereas the A level had a mean of 3.29 (SD=1.16). This means that those who choose the B level strongly believe that good writers report on what is already established. Sander-Reio et al. (2014: 9) suggest that writing beliefs can be formed on the basis of teaching writing.

The belief in transaction, which advocates that good writing includes cognitive processes and a strong involvement of emotions, is the only sub-category of beliefs about writing that had higher values for the participants who choose the A level Matura exam in EFL. When we look at transactional beliefs and its items closely (see Table 5), we can see that people who believe in transaction use writing to help with their thought process and involve emotions in their writing. We can safely assume that those who believe in transaction also enjoy writing and use it often. Previous research found that transaction positively correlates with enjoying writing (see Sanders-

Reio et al., 2014: 9). Therefore, it is not strange that transaction would be ranked so high for those who are taking the A level on the exams.

It also makes sense that transaction would be lower for those who believe more strongly in transmission like the participants who choose the B level at the exams, as transmission believes in reporting what authorities think, therefore it is not necessary to involve one's own brain, when everything has already been thought of.

The recursive process, which states that an indicator of good writing is revision, had higher values with those participants choosing the B level. Research suggests that the recursive process has more benefits when it's an assignment that is done over a longer period of time. Essays done during a short period of time do not allow for a lot of revision (Sanders-Reio et al. 2014: 9). This would mean that those who believe in the recursive process are more anxious about writing short assignments than those who don't. The fact that students who did not choose the B level believe more strongly in the recursive process than those who did may have played a role in their choices. Even teachers tend to often stress the need to revise one's work before handing it in. Students, who do not know how to employ writing techniques that help them with this may feel more anxious about writing.

Surprisingly enough, both audience orientation and the recursive process negatively correlated with writing performance (see Table 15), which negates previous research (Sander-Reio et al., 2014) which found positive correlation between these items. Sanders-Reio (2010) states that beliefs about writing could be influenced by the country in which a person lives, the school they attended or even the teacher that taught them to write. This could explain the different results.

The only significant correlation for writing performance, which corroborates previous research (Sanders-Reio, 2010 and Sanders-Reio et al., 2014), was found with the belief in transmission, which negatively correlates with writing performance (see Table 15). Sanders-Reio et al. (2014) state that transmission (i.e. the belief that writing is about reporting what authorities said about writing) is only the first stage of writing. Similarly, transaction (i.e., the belief that good writing is about being involved cognitively in the writing process) is the second stage of writing. It is no wonder that students who believe only in the first stage of writing cannot produce a good writing text since both stages are needed for that.

When we look at writing anxiety however, we can see a positive correlation with transmission. This means that the higher the anxiety the higher the belief in transmission and vice versa.



However, writing anxiety has a negative correlation with transaction. This corroborates previous research (Sanders-Reio, 2010; Sanders-Reio et al., 2014). Students who believe in transmission have high writing anxiety and low writing performance. On the other hand, students who believe in transaction have lower writing anxiety and higher writing performance. It seems that the key to good performance and low anxiety is to cognitively involve oneself in writing and not think too much on what authorities think. As stated above transaction is the second stage of writing and only through transaction can a writing text be completely made, because knowledge is needed from the author of the text as much as from writing authorities (Kellogg, 2008 as cited in Sanders-Reio et al., 2014). People who do not have that knowledge or do not believe it is necessary are going to be more anxious about producing a writing text.

And lastly, a negative correlation was found between writing performance and writing anxiety (see Table 17). This could be due to the fact that those students who get continuous negative feedback for their writing develop writing anxiety. One of the items in the WAT was *I know I'm going to get a bad grade before I had in my essay*. This item shows that anxiety is connected with the fear of failure. This finding does not corroborate previous research which did not find writing apprehension to have any significant impact on writing performance (Sanders Reio, 2010, Sanders-Reio et al., 2014; Erkan, 2011).

The result show one thing: writing anxiety and beliefs about writing could be used to help students achieve better results. Student who have high writing anxiety have lower performance. The best way to help student with their writing anxiety would of course be to practice writing essays (Reeves, 1997: 39). However, we need to take into consideration that writing an essay in class takes a lot of time and therefore cannot be practiced in class very often (essays are graded only twice in a school year). This is where beliefs about writing come in. As we have seen transaction negatively correlates with writing anxiety, therefore if teachers made students aware that good writing is about cognitive process and emotions it could make them less anxious about writing. Even most researches of writing say that “writing is an emotional as well as cognitive activity, that is, we think and feel while we are writing” (Cheng 2002: 647).

In turn, transmission positively correlates with writing anxiety, therefore, when teaching students about for example, the argumentative essay; it should be made aware to students that just reporting what authority thinks on a subject isn't the only thing that makes a good paper.

To conclude, the relationship between writing anxiety and beliefs about writing may prove to be useful while teaching EFL to students of a high school level.

## 6. Conclusion

The results point to the fact that writing anxiety and beliefs about writing are linked. If we examine what the students believe to be good writing, before we start teaching them how to write, we may be able to predict which students will have a higher writing anxiety.

Writing anxiety and the belief in transaction have a strong negative correlation. On the other, hand writing anxiety and transmission have a strong positive correlation. This fact may be important since the type of essay that is given at the Matura exam is an argumentative essay, which in its essence is about reporting facts in a given form. This is what transmission advocates, but since we know that those who believe in transmission have a higher writing anxiety it may not be beneficial to have this type of essay on the exams. However, since it is the most practiced type of essay a teacher could also give their students some additional tips for writing such an essay, assure them that not all information needs to be one hundred percent correct or to simply stick to facts and knowledge that they already have and not think too much about it.

Furthermore, the recursive process, which advocates that good writing is revised, re-read and edited, was shown to have a negative correlation with writing performance in previous research (Sanders-Reio et al., 2014) (see Table 15). This makes sense especially for high-stake testing, such as the Matura exam in EFL. The writing portion (which lasts for 75 min) during the exam allows no time to go back over the writing and edit it before handing it. It would seem to be beneficial to help students by explaining to them and showing them how to write a good essay in a short amount of time without editing it. For example, a teacher could tell the students to stick to forms they know, use words that they are sure they know how to spell and rephrase something if they cannot remember the right word. All of this would help them feel less pressured about their writing and its quality.

Since obviously writing performance and writing anxiety are negatively correlated with each other (see Table 17), it would also help to talk to students who have continuously bad writing performance, since some of them might have bad performance solely on the basis of their writing anxiety. Furthermore, since it was proven that students who have writing anxiety tend to avoid writing activities it can also help to explain to them that they can only get better if they practice and to maybe give them small writing tasks to complete at home for exercises without grading them.

To conclude, it is important to be aware that writing anxiety and beliefs about writing play a role in writing performance and students' beliefs about writing. It would be beneficial to test the students at the beginning of their secondary schooling to see which students might develop writing anxiety and to help them overcome it.

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## Appendix 1 - WAT

### Upitnik - WAATWE

Spol (zaokruži): M / Ž

Razred: \_\_\_\_\_

Ime škole: \_\_\_\_\_

Ocjena iz Engleskog: \_\_\_\_\_

Koju prosječnu ocjenu bi si dao/dala za pismene sastavke iz engleskog: \_\_\_\_\_

Koju razinu državne mature iz engleskog želiš pisati (zaokruži): višu / nižu / neću pisati maturu iz engleskog

Koliko godina učiš engleski? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Pažljivo pročitaj sljedeći izjave i zaokruži broj koji izražava koliko se slažeš/ne slažeš s izjavom. **Izjave se odnose na pisanje na engleskom jeziku!**

1 = uopće se ne slažem

2 = djelomično se slažem

3 = ne znam

4 = prilično se slažem

5 = potpuno se slažem

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Ne volim pisati na engleskom.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Smeta mi što se ocjenjuju pismeni radovi.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Veselim se kad mogu pismeno izraziti svoje ideje.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Ne volim pisati sastavke kad znam da će se ocjenjivati.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Bojim se pismenih radova na satu engleskog.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Veselim se kad profesoru/rici predam sastavak na ocjenjivanje.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Kad trebam početi pisati sastavak, kao da mi pamet stane.                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Izražavanje ideja pisanjem gubitak je vremena.                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Uživao/la bih davati sastavke za ocjenjivanje i objavljivanje u časopisima. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Volim zapisivati svoje ideje.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Siguran/na sam u svoju sposobnost da jasno izrazim svoje ideje kroz pisanje. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Volim prijateljima dati da pročitaju što sam napisao/la.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Nervozan/na sam kad trebam pisati.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Ljudi vole čitati ono što ja napišem.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Volim pisati.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Teško mi je svoje ideje jasno izraziti u pismenom obliku.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Pisanje je zabavno.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Znam da ću napisati loš sastavak prije nego uopće počnem pisati.             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Volim vidjeti svoje ideje na papiru.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Uživam razgovarati s drugima o svojim sastavcima.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Vrlo mi je teško organizirati ideje dok pišem sastavak.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Kad predam svoj sastavak, znam da ću dobiti lošu ocjenu.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Lako mi je napisati dobar sastavak.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Većina drugih učenika piše bolje od mene.                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Ne volim kad se moji sastavci ocjenjuju.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Pisanje mi ide loše.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Appendix 2 – Beliefs about Writing Survey

2. Pažljivo pročitaj sljedeći izjave i zaokruži broj koji izražava koliko se slažeš/ne slažeš s izjavom. **Izjave se odnose na pisanje na engleskom jeziku!**

1 = uopće se ne slažem

2 = djelomično se slažem

3 = ne znam

4 = prilično se slažem

5 = potpuno se slažem

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Dobri pisci uključuju mnogo citata od stručnjaka u svoja djela.                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Pisanje bi se trebalo fokusirati na informacije iz knjiga i članaka.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Pisanje je proces koji uključuje puno emocija.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Dobri pisci komplicirane informacije pojasne.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Pisanje zahtjeva ponovno pregledavanje napisanog kako bi se poboljšalo napisano.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Dobri pisci uzimaju u obzir svoje čitače.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Ključ dobrog pisanja je jasno prikazivanje informacija.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Dobri pisci adaptiraju svoju poruku svojim čitačima.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Prepravljanje napisanog je proces sa mnogo faza.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Dobri pisci imaju na umu svoju publiku.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Pisanje mi pomaže bolje razumjeti ono što osjećam.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Ključ dobrog pisanja je pregledavanje napisanog.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Dobro pisanje uključuje puno prepravaka.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Dobri pisci svoje teze potkrepljuju.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Ključ uspješnog pisanja je točno prenijeti ono što stručnjaci pisci misle.               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Dobri pisci vrlo detaljno objasne svoja mišljenja i otkrića.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Najvažniji razlog za pisanje je prenijeti ono što stručnjaci misle o određenom predmetu. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Pisanje mi pomaže vidjeti kompleksnost ideja.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |



|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. Dobri pisci ne dopuštaju izboru riječi da zasjeni njihovu poruku.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Moje misli i ideje postaju mi sve jasnije kako pišem i prepravljam.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Dobar pisac je orijentiran prema svojoj publici.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Dobri pisci su logični i uvjerljivi.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Pisci se moraju potpuno uživiti u pisanje.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Dobri pisci su lagani za čitanje.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Dobro pisanje zvuči prirodno, a ne ukočeno.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Važno je birati riječi koje odgovaraju svrsi, publici, i prilici.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Pisanje je često emocionalno iskustvo.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Kod pisanja je najbolje koristiti provjerene oblike i formate i onda samo nadopisati važne informacije. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Dobri pisci pretpostave i odgovore na pitanja svoje publike.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. Pisanje pomaže u stvaranju novih ideja.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |